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ABSTRACT

In response to articles in London's "Daily Mail" newspaper asserting that young children do not have the intellectual, social or moral skill to grasp the concept of heterosexuality and should not be exposed to lessons in bisexually or homosexuality, this paper argues that sexuality is pervasive in primary schools and suggests that the presumption of heterosexuality is the key matrix through which gender is understood by the children themselves, by most teachers and by other adults active in the school culture. Based on in-depth observation of and interviews with children in schools in London and central England, the paper contends that heterosexuality is a part of the stuff of every day life on playgrounds and in classrooms and is represented in: (1) imagined futures; (2) traditional games and rhymes; (3) versions of games involving running and catching; (4) sexist/sexual harassment; (5) assays into the world of "going out"; and (6) gossip networks. Throughout, the paper provides many examples of actions and conversations to illustrate the argument. The paper addresses the myth-making that developed in one classroom around the teacher's decision to come out as gay to his year 5 class (9-10 year olds) and the lessons that might be learned from that experience. The paper concludes by noting that cultures of schooling are, indeed, cultures of sexuality. Contains 16 references. (Author/MOK)

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Cultures of Schooling, Cultures of Sexuality

by

Debbie Epstein

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Abstract[1]

This paper explores the ways in which children in Early Years and primary education (aged 3-11) construct themselves as girls and as boys. It will argue that these constructions assume and reinforce heterosexuality as the key matrix through which gender is understood by the children themselves and by teachers and other adults active in the school context. Based on in-depth observation of and interviews with children in schools in central England and north London, the paper will show how (hetero)sexuality becomes part of the stuff of everyday like in playgrounds and classrooms in a number ways. The paper will pay particular attention to the myth-making which developed in one classroom around the teacher's decision to come out as gay to his Year 5 class (9-10 year olds) and the lessons that might be learned from this experience.

Introduction

At the beginning of March 1996, the Daily Mail's front page banner headline, running across 3 columns and occupying 41/2 inches of prime space a third of the way down the page read '5-Year-Olds to Get Gay Lessons' (Halpin 1996). This is the space that sells papers, the space reserved for the headline likely to interpellate the maximum number of readers. Most of page 1 of this issue is concerned with this story, which is continued, taking up two-thirds of page 4 and the first editorial leader comment on page 8. Clearly, this is a matter of concern to the paper's editor, journalists and, presumably, its readers.[2] The story concerns the production of a resource book by the Health Promotion Service of Camden and Islington Community Health Services (Mole 1996) which, in the more measured tones of the Times Educational Supplement, constituted a 'New attempt to promote lessons in gay tolerance' (Whitehead 1996). Both the Daily Mail news article and its leader column stress the inappropriateness of teaching young children about lesbian and gay sexuality. The article, for example, quotes Tory MP, Lady Olga Maitland, in the following terms:

> This is political correctness gone mad. The people who are putting this kind of thing forward as a model for children are frankly rather sick. We ought to be doing more to encourage normal family life.'
>
> Ideas promoted by the book could be 'distressing and corrupting' for youngsters she added .
>
> (Halpin 1996: 1)

The leader column takes up the theme. It begins with a pseudo-quote from the book and continues:

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[1]I would like to thank the children and staff of 'Badminton', 'Bankhead', 'Dover', 'Edendale Junior ' and 'Jennings' Schools for allowing me free access to their schools and for their willingness to share their worlds with me. If, reading this paper, they recognise themselves and others in their pseudonymous schools, I hope they feel that they have been fairly represented.

[2]This is not to suggest that readers of the paper necessarily share its editorial stance, nor that meanings of articles are fixed rather than negotiated. What I am suggesting here is that the prominence given to this story (and the frequency with which similar stories appear) indicate that, in the opinion of the production team (journalistic and commercial) of the Daily Mail, stories of this kind, discussed in this manner, are likely to boost rather than depress sales. It is, in this context, interesting to note that none of the other national tabloids picked up the story -- an unusual occurrence with regard to the popular media and opportunities to indulge in verbal 'queer bashing' in the UK.

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> Incredible as it may seem, the characters and all the clichéd jargon in this monologue (which we have composed) are taken directly from a resource book for teachers, Colours of the Rainbow, published by the oh-so politically correct Camden and Islington Health Service Trust in inner London. They come, amazingly, from the section designed for teachers of five year olds.[3]
>
> Discrimination against gays is patently unacceptable. But to teach children about homosexuality and bisexuality at an age when they can surely have little understanding of heterosexual conduct is political correctness run mad. Quite simply, young children do not have the intellectual, social or moral skills to grasp such concepts.
>
> (DailyMail 1996: 8)

This paper takes issue with the common sense view of children expressed by the Daily Mail. I will use evidence drawn from in-depth interviews and observation of young children in schools to argue that sexuality is pervasive in primary schools, that it constitutes an important part of the explanatory narratives and myths developed by young children and that young children are engaged, from a very early age, in active processes of developing the 'intellectual, social [and] moral skills' with which they can negotiate meanings about sexuality. Moreover, such processes are strongly imbricated in children's constructions of gendered identities.[4]

Through a detailed examination of the ways in which children(-as-pupils) produce themselves as girls and as boys, I will suggest that the presumption of heterosexuality[5] is the key matrix through which gender is understood by the children themselves and by most teachers and other adults active in the school context. The research for this paper took place in two different areas of the country. First, in nursery and primary classes in central England and, later, in a junior school in north London (which I shall call Edendale School) where I spent a term with one Year 5 class, accompanying them in both classroom and playground. In the schools in central England, I had a teacherly role because I was, at that time, working collaboratively with teachers on an action research project[6] concerned with staff development and school change. In London, I went into the class as a researcher and adopted, as far as it was possible to do so, a 'least adult role'.[7] It is, however, important to recognize that positioning oneself in the least adult role possible does not

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[3]It is not part of the remit of this paper to analyse closely such journalistic writing. It is, however, worth pointing out the extraordinary sleight of hand by which the Daily Mail's leader writer has acknowledged that the quote beginning the article was invented, while making it seem as if it is actually taken from the book under discussion.

[4]This is a point which I have also made elsewhere, see, for example Epstein (1995)

[5]See, also Epstein and Johnson (1994)

[6]The primary focus of this project was the development of anti-racist education in predominantly white primary schools, but much of my recorded observation, inevitably, concerned gender. For a discussion of this project Epstein (1993)

[7]See Thorne (1993: chapter 3) for a discussion of school-based ethnography with children and the perils and pleasures of taking up a 'least adult' position. This point was made to me forcibly on my second day in the school, when a little girl approached me in the playground and asked 'Are you a girl, or are you a teacher?'. She clearly had no framework for understanding who a researcher was but was puzzled because I did not fit into any of her existing frameworks. It was clear to her that I was not, in fact, 'a girl' but I did not behave like a teacher or any of the other adults normally seen in school (dinner supervisor, classroom assistant or parent). I am currently working on the issues raised for research methodology in school-based research by this kind of interaction.

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mean that one becomes a child in the eyes of the children — though not behaving in a teacherly way does change, significantly, the ways in which children relate to you.[8]

In both parts of the country it was clear that, while these young children were not sexually active or aware in the ways that secondary school pupils often are, nevertheless they knew a great deal about (hetero)sexuality, which was part of the stuff of everyday life in their playgrounds and classrooms in a number ways:

- through imagined futures, particularly as heterosexual women in couples and families which tend to dominate the fantasies of adulthood expressed by girls in their play and story-telling/writing;
- through traditional games and rhymes, particularly those associated with skipping and newer games based particularly on popular television scenarios;
- through versions of games involving running and catching which become transmuted into arenas of sexualized chasing;
- through the sexual/sexist harassment of girls by boys and sexually charged, frequently homophobic insult exchange between children, often of the same sex;
- through early assays into the world of 'going out', 'dating', 'two-timing' and 'dumping' of some of the children.
- through the gossip networks of playground, staffroom and classroom;

Some Day My Prince Will Come

I am, of course, not the first person to use this song title to encapsulate the way in which the romance of heterosexual relating constitutes a primary mythology through which girls and women make sense of (or are expected to make sense of) the world. Valerie Walkerdine (1984, 1990) for example, used it as the title of an essay considering the 'ideological preparation for adolescent sexuality in children's fiction, particularly girl comics' (1984: 162). Here, I have used the phrase to capture the strength with which young girls often seem to imagine their futures as tied up with heterosexual romance. For example, the Year 1 (i.e. 5-6 year old) children in Dover School were asked to draw themselves as grown-ups as part of a topic on 'work'. The discussion before the task was set had been partly about paid work (the kinds of jobs grown-ups did) and partly about unpaid work that adults, mainly mothers, did in the children's homes. The account of the ways in which the children took up the task as recorded in my research diary reads:

> The children were then [after the discussion] asked to draw or paint a picture of themselves which could be called 'When I grow up I will be ...' As they settled to the task, I overheard some snippets of conversation, much of it reflecting quite conventional gendered expectations – 'I'm going to be an astronaut' from one of the boys. A group of girls at the painting table got into an argument over who could have the white paint first. 'Why do you all need white?' I asked them. 'Because

[8] This point was made to me forcibly on my second day in the school, when a little girl approached me in the playground and asked 'Are you a girl, or are you a teacher?'. She clearly had no framework for understanding who a researcher was but was puzzled because I did not fit into any of her existing frameworks. It was clear to her that I was not, in fact, 'a girl' but I did not behave like a teacher or any of the other adults normally seen in school (dinner supervisor, classroom assistant or parent). I am currently working on the issues raised for research methodology in school-based research by this kind of interaction.

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> we're going to be brides when we grow up' they explained. In the event, 5 out of the 14 girls in the class painted themselves as brides and 3 others drew themselves as mothers with small children. The rest drew themselves in a variety of jobs -- as teachers, nurses, film stars and one pilot. All the boys, in contrast, represented their adult selves in jobs of one kind or another -- firemen and astronauts being the most popular.

Of course, this can be interpreted simply as children reflecting stereotyped gender roles. However I would like to argue that it involves an altogether more active process of investment in heterosexual forms of relating on the part of the girls. The role of 'bride' is not simply a conforming to gendered expectations. Rather, the act of drawing/ thinking about themselves in this particular category constitutes an active reinvestment in and construction of themselves as heterosexually feminized beings. The fantasy is one which is, of course, ubiquitous in fairy stories and other mythologies and may be one of escape. The happy ending represented in the girls' drawings of themselves as brides and in stories like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty or the comics investigated by Valerie Walkerdine do not fantasize beyond the wedding. These young girls are invested in the romance of heterosexuality, aware of the social recognition involved in becoming that iconic figure of normative heterosexual relating, the radiant bride. The mother figure of their self-representations is, perhaps, more complexly oriented. Two of the three girls drawing themselves as mothers were the children of single women, and in none of these pictures is a father shown. Here we are, perhaps, seeing an expression of these girls' desires not only to be, but to possess, their mothers (Mitchell 1986).

I have written elsewhere (Epstein 1995) about three 5 year old girls in Bankhead School who fought for a chance to play with the classroom bricks and built complicated structures while creating narratives taken from domestic and fairy story genres:

> Becky: Let's build a house. Come on.
> Jenny: Yes, let's. Then we can make tea ...
> Becky: (interrupting) Not a house, a palace. The dolls can be princesses.
> Jenny: Princesses, mm.
> Becky: It'll have to be big.
> Jenny: Big and grand
>
> (*ibid.*: 65)

As I argue there:

> The fact that the girls positioned themselves firmly as girls (by using domestic and fairy tale narratives in their play) while at the same time challenging stereotypical feminir:ity may be seen as being, in some ways, contradictory. However, this is a problem only if we see people as being, in some way, unified, monolithic (and rational) wholes. But people (girls and boys, women and men) do occupy contradictory positions within discourse. Identity is not whole and unchanging, but is, rather, constantly (re)created within particular discursive fields (like schools) and from available discursive positions.
>
> (*ibid.*: 66)

In this case, the girls were producing themselves as, at one and the same time, well capable of that boyish activity 'doing bricks', and as invested in feminized and heterosexualized romance. As some much older girls commented in Edendale School, 'girls can't marry girls'.

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It is not only children, however, who assume that they will, universally, have heterosexual futures as adults. Teachers, too, are often complicit, indeed active, in this construction, often through the mechanisms of child-centred education.[9] Thus, in Dover School, the girls' pictures of themselves as future brides was not taken as an opportunity to explore why they might imagine themselves in this way but was, rather, accepted by the teacher without question. The act of valuing what the children had done – 'What a lovely picture, so you're going to be a bride when you grow up' – became a reinforcement of the desirability of this particular fantasy. Sometimes, indeed, teachers call on children to act out the fantasy of marriage. As one young, Black gay man I interviewed recalled:

> Ayo: We were doing a thing on weddings
> DE: So, what, you were about 6 or 7?
> Ayo: Yeah, and they decided that we should all play at getting married.
> DE: They decided? The teachers?
> Ayo: Yeah. As a fun thing to do, I suppose ... And we, some, I think two other "couples" or, you know, speech marks, they progressed up an imaginary aisle and had confetti and things thrown at them and this girl who I was supposed to get married to didn't want to, and she started screaming the place down, and I was really rattled.

Here we see an organized celebration of heterosexual romance, a playing out of the fantasy of the happy end orchestrated by the teacher. After the lunch break, Ayo reports, the teacher persuaded the little girl to 'marry' him after all. It is not possible to know, at this distance and without speaking to her, what her objections were. What is clear, is that there was no room for them in the context of 'doing a thing on weddings' in school. Indeed, this teacher had set up a situation in which the only way in which she could avoid complicity in what Ayo experienced as the racist refusal to 'marry' him was to insist that the girl consent to being positioned as 'bride' in a hetero/sexist play ceremony.

Down by the Riverside

In practice, girls are frequently willing, indeed enthusiastic, to insert themselves into the hetero/sexist texts of skipping and other rhymes. There are an enormous number of these rhymes.[10] Whereas boys' playground games often involve running and ball games (usually football/soccer), the girls are much more frequently to be seen chatting or skipping to particular rhymes or playing clapping games. At Edendale School, one of the most popular skipping rhymes moved from kissing, through love to marriage (including the kind of ring and clothes to be worn), honeymoons and babies. On the day that I wrote it down, the girl had inserted the name of Elias, the boy in Year 5 most invested in having a 'girlfriend'. A few verses are quoted here to give a flavour of the whole:

> Elias, Elias, do you love me
> Yes, no, maybe so *(repeated till out)*
>
> Elias, Elias will you marry me
> Yes, no, maybe so *(repeated till out)*
>
> What kind of ring will you give me?
> Diamond, ruby, plastic *(repeated till out)*
> ...

---

[9] See, also Walkerdine (1981, 1984)

[10] For a collection of children's playground rhymes see Opie and Opie (1969)

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How many babies will you have?
5, 10, 15, 20 .....

It seemed to me, watching and later in conversation, that Maria, the girl who was chanting this rhyme, took as much pleasure in the fantasy as in the skipping. As she began the chant, she called over to her friend 'go find Elias'. When Elias arrived, he was quite nonchalant and distanced himself from the whole procedure. 'She's always doing that,' he told me, 'Doesn't bother me'. Later Maria told me that she would like to 'go out' with Elias but that he already had a girlfriend, a feature of the children's school lives which I will discuss below. Notwithstanding Maria's statement, it seemed to me that by and large, this activity was carried out without direct reference to the boys and that they did not have to be physically present for it to be fun. Calling Elias over while I was watching was as much for my benefit as for Maria's.

Of course, girls often indulge in verses of this kind without thinking of their meaning, enjoying the rhythm and the skipping. Nevertheless, it is an activity through which heterosexuality is normalized/naturalized (if not thought about actively). The stages in the predicted relationships move inexorably onwards (provided the skipper is not out on 'no' in the first two verses). The fantasy developed, while not about sex as such, was certainly reproducing part of a culture of heterosexuality in which girls grow up to be women who marry men, go on honeymoon and have babies. Indeed, I would argue that even where the girls chanting the rhymes are not doing so as part of an active fantasy of heterosexuality, nevertheless, they are inserting themselves within discourses of heterosexuality by the active use of signs which both denote and connote the institutions of heterosexual relating -- weddings, honeymoons and even babies.

Other rhymes were also popular for skipping. One which gave rise to gales of laughter went:

Ballerina, ballerina, turn around,
Ballerina, ballerina, touch the ground,
Ballerina, ballerina, do the splits
Ballerina, ballerina, touch your tits.

Clearly much of the fun of this particular rhyme came from the skill involved in doing the various actions demanded, but the sexual connotation of the final 'touch your tits' was obviously fun precisely because it was risqué. Another rhyme, which I heard in a large number of schools, has been popular for at least 20 years, since my now 26 year old daughter brought it home from her first school. This is a clapping, rather than a skipping, rhyme and runs through the stages of 'Susie's' life from infancy to death. When Susie reaches her teenage years, this stage is accounted for in the following terms:

When Susie was a teenager
A teenager she was
And she went
'Ma, ma, I've lost my bra
Left my knickers in my boyfriend's car'.

As with 'Ballerina, ballerina' the fun lies just as much in the fact that the rhyme is seen as 'rude' as in the skill involved in the game. These girls, playing these traditional (or modified traditional) games are using them in part, at least, to familiarise themselves with and insert themselves into positions involving heterosexual forms of relating and/or themselves as objects of the male, sexualized gaze. An alternative reading of the girls' use

of 'Susie was a ...' is that, far from identifying as/with the object of the male gaze, they are, rather, establishing themselves as active gazers. Susie, in this context, may be an object of derision rather than an object of desire. This is a more difficult interpretation of 'Ballerina', however, where the girl skipping touches her own nipples on the phrase 'touch your tits'.

An interesting development in children's play is the way in which popular television programmes are used as fodder for the creation of new games. One such game was taken from the programme 'Blind Date'. This programme, hosted by Cilla Black, is not primarily aimed at young children and is broadcast on Saturday evenings. It involves a man choosing between three women (hidden behind a screen) or vice versa on the basis of questions asked and answered, typically with the extensive use of double entendre. The couple win a 'blind date', often abroad, and the following week the couple come back and report on how they got on.[11] Nazia, one of the girls playing 'Blind Date', explained to me that it could be played either by three girls and a boy or three boys and a girl and that once the singleton had chosen then the boy and girl involved would 'go out together'. When I asked Nazia to clarify what 'going out' meant in this context, her immediate response was to say 'well, not really, just pretend'. As I shall demonstrate below, this pretence was common across a range of activities in which the children partook.

Kiss-Chase and its Variants

Notwithstanding Nazia's claim that 'Blind Date' could be played either by three girls and a boy or by three boys and a girl, every time that I observed it, it involved one boy and three girls. Interestingly, too, the boy was invariably at least a year younger than the girls. The girls stood behind a wall and numbered themselves from one to three. The boy then chose a number (the question and answer session having been dispensed with). The game finished with the chosen girl coming out from behind the wall, the boy running away and all three girls chasing after him. When they caught him, which they invariably did, the 'chosen' girl would kiss him on the cheek. This game, like 'kiss, cuddle, torture' discussed below, could be seen as a reversal of the usual gendered power relations of the school playground. The fact that the boy was always younger and smaller placed him in a less powerful position than the girls he was playing with (and it is, perhaps, significant that no boy in their own year group would play this game with them). The chasing and catching of the boy by three girls provided the girls with an opportunity to display their own power, including the power to humiliate a boy. The fact that this took place literally on the margins of a playground dominated by bigger boys playing football, is a paradox, as is the way in which playing this game can be seen as an activity which helps embed girls within the power relations of heterosexuality.

'Blind Date, as played here, was a version of the ever popular 'kiss-chase', usually seen in infant playgrounds (that is, amongst children from 4-7). Like 'Susie', kiss-chase has been played in British playgrounds for a very long time. It was a well-established game when I first began teaching children of this age in the early 1970s and has continued to be passed on from one generation of school children to the next up to the present day. Most of the children who play this game are aged between 5 and 7 years old. The game usually begins with a small group of children (either boys or girls) walking around the playground with their arms around each others' shoulders and chanting 'Who wants to play (pause) kiss-chase'. This continues for some time, and is, indeed, part of the game. At a certain point, the children break ranks and the chasing game begins. Girls chase boys or vice versa and

[11]Despite a considerable gay following, the programme makers resolutely refuse to entertain the idea of putting on a 'gay Blind Date' from time to time. 'Blind Date' was one of the few popular playground games involving both boys and girls, although it was played disproportionately by girls.

when they catch someone of the opposite sex, they kiss them. The game involves much screaming on the part of the girls. In this way, as (Thorne 1993) notes, girls and boys play together in a game which marks gender both strongly and as being in binary and heterosexual opposition to each other.

At Edendale School, the children had evolved another version of 'kiss-chase' which they called 'kiss, cuddle, torture'. This was the subject not only of playground activity, but of much discussion in the classroom – who played, who chose what, and so on'. When I interviewed the children, this was one of the subjects of discussion. Samantha and Louise represented the game in the following terms:

Samantha: And we play this game called 'kiss, cuddle and torture', but we don't really do any of it, but cos, like, we catch [the boys], put them like in jail and then, then, when we've got all of them we'll ask them and they'll go 'torture'. ...
Louise: We never say torture, we [the girls] always say, give us a cuddle
Samantha: Yes

The choice of 'torture' by the boys is, perhaps, part of showing that they are, in some way, 'real men' who can put up with being kicked (which, the girls explained, was what torture entailed) rather than being soft enough to be kissed by a girl. In another interview, Elias and Marios provided a different view:

Elias: I like girls who hit me. ... Especially, she kicks you in some place that's not nice.
DE: Right. Is that when you're playing 'kiss, cuddle, torture'?
Elias: Yeah
Marios: Sometimes, Patrick, he gets behinds us and shouts out 'torture' and we're the ones that gets kicked and he's hiding behind us.
Elias: And we get all of the beats (sic) and on the floor for about 10 minutes.
DE: ... Why is it fun to have torture?
Elias: Well, when they kick you it's funny. Like they get all mad and stuff.
DE: Yeah?
Marios: Sometimes we don't say it. People just hide behind us, shouting out 'torture' and we just ...
DE: When I was speaking to someone about it before, I can't remember, maybe it was Samantha, ... and she was telling me that ... what happened was that the boys would sometimes choose cuddle and sometimes choose torture, but they didn't usually choose kiss. Is that right?
Elias: We always choose kiss. Mostly kiss we choose.

There are a number of interesting points to be made about this interchange. As in 'Blind Date', gender difference is strongly marked, indeed exaggerated by this game, as a binary and heterosexual opposition. Boys and girls, at least according to the girls, choose differently. The girls' choice of 'cuddle' meant that they could avoid 'torture' and also kissing a boy who was not their 'boyfriend'. Here it seems at first that Elias' pleasure is attached to the fun of seeing the girls' get mad. Marios, in contrast, in anxious to indicate that sometimes torture is chosen for them by another boy. However, from my discussions with both boys and girls and from my playground observation, it seems that the girls literally never chose torture, whereas the boys frequently did.

Connell (1995) suggests that the masculinities are, at least in part, achieved through a circuit of production in which bodily experiences (in his particular example, of same sex

enjoyment) are understood through the lens of what those experiences signify in the culture and then similar bodily experiences are entered into again with these culturally rich expectations. For both boys and girls, 'kiss, cuddle, torture' involved developing a repertoire of bodily experiences culturally interpreted. Rather than just being painful (which it is) the experience of 'torture' (being kicked 'in some place that's not nice') is inscribed into the boys' 'boyness'. And possibly because he is established in the classroom and the school more widely very much as a boy, and, moreover, one who is desirable as a 'boyfriend', Elias appears to be the only boy involved in the game who can get away with choosing 'kiss'. Girls, too, enter into a circuit of 'bodily reflexive' experience. In the context of the game, they empower themselves/are empowered through their ability to 'torture' and to choose not to be 'tortured'. Moreover, as the girls pointed out, the boys are easy to fool and, if they were not fooled, then it would be within the girls' power to change the terms of the game:

Samantha: Yes, but when I kiss the boys but I just touch my cheek to his cheek
Louise: Yeah
Samantha: And I make a noise, like kissing
Louise: Yeah, that's what I do as well, cos then they think that you're really kissing them (pause) but we're not ...
Louise: If they kissed us, really, we would, we wouldn't, like, play I guess
Samantha: Yeah, maybe not
Louise: We would but, we would play no kissing

Of course, the terms of their power are constrained by the more general relations of gendered power within the school. As pointed out above, the playground, especially during dinner play, was completely dominated by boys playing football and this was frequently a subject of complaint from the girls. Furthermore, the hetero/sexist harassment[12] of girls by boys was a constant presence, either in the girls' concerns or because it was actively taking place.

Why Do They Treat Us Like That?

Thorne (1993: 80-81) discussed the question of playground aggression, which, she says:

> ... resembles the structuring of sexual harassment. The harasser, nearly always male, often claims that verbal and physical intrusions into the target's personal space are 'all in fun,' while the target, usually female, sees it as unwanted and even coercive attention.

My observation would confirm this. However, in addition to the kind of playground invasions which she discusses, I was also made aware of the ways in which the boys could reclaim their power through turning the game of 'kiss, cuddle, torture' into an opportunity for harassing the girls. As Elias explained:

Elias: But Patrick's rude. He says, um, you could choose kiss, cuddle, um, or torture and then he goes 'I could choose something else'. ... And he goes 'sex' as well.
DE: Right, and does he know what that, I mean, what does he mean when he says that?

[12]See Epstein (1996) for a discussion of the reasons for moving from use of the term 'sexual harassment' to using the term 'hetero/sexist harassment'

Elias: (with emphasis) He means it. And then he lies on the floor and goes 'come on'
DE: Right
Elias: and then they run away.
DE: So, I'm interested in that. I mean, I'm interested in.. So, when Patrick says that, do some of the other boys do that as well?
Elias: Some of the other boys do it to.
Marios: It's mostly Patrick. ...
DE: And so what d'you think that means when you say that. Y'know, what d'you think that, what d'you want the girls to do when that happens?
Elias: We're only joking

In choosing 'sex', Patrick has gone altogether too far for the girls. They are comfortable when they are in control, but Patrick's challenge to that control makes the game untenable. Their fantasies may be about hetero/sexuality, but they are clearly not about hetero/sex. And the boys' challenge is as much about asserting their male power as it is about any fantasy of really having sex – thus Elias' protestation 'We're only joking'.

Another opportunity for the assertion of male power through hetero/sexist harassment was when the children changing for swimming lessons. Nadia introduced the subject spontaneously in an interview I did with her and Christina:

Nadia: You know when we were going swimming, Elias and Levi, they come into the girls' changing rooms
Christina: Yeah!!
...
DE: So how does that make you feel, when they do that?
Christina: We hate it.
...
DE: So, why d'you think they do that?
Nadia: They just want to look at our bodies.
DE: Why?
Christina: Don't know
Nadia: I don't know.
(long pause)
DE: But it makes you feel very embarrassed?
Nadia: Yeah. I feel like, feel like screaming and slapping him on the face.
DE: Right. Cos it's, kind of, taking away from your privacy, isn't it?
...
Christina: ... Elias said 'I'm gonna look at the girls naked in the dressing room on Friday', he said, 'I want to kiss the girls, Friday'.
Nadia: *(continuing with what Elias said)* 'Then I'll come in and kiss them and do all of that, then I'll come and have a look at them, and I'll pull down their trousers and pull down their tops and all that'
...
Nadia: We hate it. We absolutely hate it.
Christina: We don't, we don't treat them like that
Nadia: We don't treat them like that, so why do they treat us like that?

The above extracts are taken from several pages of transcript, in which the girls describe at length the harassment they endure at the hands (or, more literally, eyes) of some, at least, of the boys. The power they are able to exercise in other contexts is undercut by this

positioning of them as sex objects. Part of what is happening here, is the mythologizing of Elias as, at one and the same time, the most desirable of the boys in the class and (with Levi) the most harassing.

For the girls at Edendale, the main practical recourse they had was to the teacher. Feeling like 'slapping him on the face' was not a real option, however desirable it seemed. The problem with turning to the teacher was twofold: first it meant that the girls were, in effect, saying that they could not deal with this themselves and this could be seen as both infantilizing and, indeed, feminizing; second, they were turning to authority in a culture where 'telling tales' was not seen as appropriate by themselves, by the boys or even by the teachers.

'Dating' and 'Dumping'

Part of the confusion for the girls over how to deal with hetero/sexist harassment from Elias is that he was also the boy most involved in (and most desired for) a whole set of activities around 'dating' and 'dumping'. Even very young children will talk about having (opposite sex) 'girlfriends' and 'boyfriends'. I certainly heard this kind of language from children as young as 6. Often, it was an opportunity for teasing. Thus, when a child is caught during the game 'kiss-chase', other children will often take up the cry that 'X loves Y' or is 'going out' with Y. (Redman 1994) has written about how a group of 10-11 year old girls gained their revenge for harassment on a couple of boys by circulating a note which read 'Curtis loves Ranjit'. In this case they were inserting themselves within a heterosexist and homophobic discourse in order to undercut what actions on the part of the boys which they experienced as hetero/sexist harassment. At the same time, the note depended, for its power, on the existence of discourse about 'girlfriends' and 'boyfriends' (of the opposite sex) which already existed in their school. This was widespread at Edendale School, as it was at Dover School. This is not to say that all the children in the school/class were engaged in the activities involved in 'going out', but rather that they had ways of understanding them and that, in some ways, those children who did partake could be seen as carrying the burden and excitement of thinking about heterosexual dating for others in the class.

Samantha and Louise had a highly elaborated account of 'going out', 'two-timing' and 'dumping':

Samantha:	On Friday... he [Elias] told me that he wants to go out with me and I said yes and he goes 'alright then, we're going out, yeah'. And it feels alright
DE:	Yeah?
Samantha:	Cos I've had one [boyfriend] before
DE:	Right. And what did you do with the boyfriend you had before?
Samantha:	He doesn't like me any more
DE:	Aaah
Louise:	He two-timed us
Samantha:	Yeah
DE:	What does that mean?
Louise:	It means that he --
Samantha:	He always goes out with both of us. Most boys go out with both of us. ... Cos, first he was going out with me and then he started going out with Louise.
DE:	Right
Louise:	And then he, then he goes out with both of us. ...
DE:	So what does it mean when you're going out

Samantha: When you're young it means, like, like you're, you're boyfriend and girlfriend and you kiss each other sometimes in school
DE: Mm
Samantha: Like, if they say, 'kiss me' then we just kiss them
DE: Right
Samantha: Or, um, give them a cuddle. Like, on Friday, we would give them a cuddle
DE: Mm. But it's a good thing to have a boyfriend, is it?
Samantha: Yeah, yeah, cos then, at school, someone's gonna beat you up, no-one's gonna look after you
Louise: Yeah, that's what, maybe your boyfriend will come along and beat them up. ... I used to have a boyfriend
DE: Right
Louise: And he was two-timing us
DE: Yes, you said that before
Samantha: There's two boys, that are two-timing all of us
Louise: Yeah.
DE: So how do boys get to two time you?
Samantha: Well, they start going out with someone and then after they find another girl and then they think that they're much better than us and then they, um, start going out with them as well.
DE: Mm.
Louise: We were in the infants when we first met them, this boy, that liked us, cos he liked us the best, then he got to know me and then he liked both of us, but we didn't really used to care when he used to two time us in the infants, cos it doesn't, it didn't really matter to us.
DE: But now it does?
Both: Yeah
DE: Why does it matter?
Louise: It's, cos like, like, it's not really fair when you two –
Samantha: Yeah, cos, um, if you want to kiss them, then the other one might be kissing them and then, then –
Louise: Then you get mixed up and everything
Samantha: Yes.

What I find particularly interesting about Samantha and Louise's account is that there is no expectation that the children involved in 'going out' with each other would, in fact, go anywhere. There was, however, some kind of investment in romance, in being 'looked after' and in monogamy. Two-timing someone was definitely seen as a problem. Elias' account of 'going out' with Samantha is also interesting:

Elias: Samantha, on Friday, said to me, 'd'you want to go out with me' and I said 'alright then'.
DE: What does that mean, going out with someone
Elias: Like, like ..
DE: What d'you do?
Elias: You like each other, and you love each other, sort of. No, not love, like *(pause)*
Marios: Fancy
Elias: Yes, sort of, fancy

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DE: So, if you, if you're going out with Christina, what d'you actually do about it? D'you actually go to places together or d'you just say 'oh well, I'm going out'?

Elias: We just say go, I don't go out places, um, I don't see Christina that much.

Marios supplies the term 'fancy' when Elias is struggling to find a word to describe how he feels about Samantha with whom he is 'going out'. The word carries much more sexually charged and, perhaps, objectifying connotations than any of the terms used by the girls. But both girls and boys would seem to indicate that 'going out' with someone is more a matter of status than of any kind of concrete actions of relationship. While this is a far cry from the 'going out' which older children and adults might engage in, it can, again, be seen as a process through which the cultures and conventions of heterosexuality are entered into at a stage earlier than the Daily Mail would have us believe.

Gossip Networks

Schools, in general, are hotbeds of gossip. Children gossip about each other and about teachers. Teachers gossip about each other and about children and their families. The schools I spent time in were no exception. Here I want to focus not so much on gossip but on an unexpected closing down of the usual gossip networks in Edendale School. The Year 5 teacher, Mr Stuart came out as gay to the children in his class while I was there. This was not a sudden decision; he had been out among the staff for a long time and had met with the school's Governing Body during the previous year and obtained their support for the idea that, should it be appropriate, he would come out to children in the school. The question arose in a session on the class topic 'Me, My Family and My History'. Mr Stuart had asked the children to work in groups to try to establish three 'facts' about boys and three 'facts' about girls. They quickly discovered that this was not possible without resort to 'rude' things such as 'girls have vaginas' and 'boys have penises'.

One of the groups came up with the fact that 'girls can't marry girls' to which Mr Stuart responded that while this was true because of the law, nevertheless 'women can love and live with women and men can love and live with men'. One of the boys immediately called out 'oh, that's disgusting'. In the course of challenging this heartfelt statement, Mr Stuart said that he was gay. The children's immediate reaction was to deny this because, as Elias said 'Everyone says you're not gay, because your girlfriend is Ms Allen'. When Mr Stuart said again that he was gay and loved and lived with another man, another child said, in a puzzled tone, 'but we saw you and Ms Allen and you were in the greengrocers, laughing'. Clearly, the gossip networks had been active and the two teachers had been paired off in the children's minds (after all, shopping for fruit and vegetables is a very domestic act!).

Much to my surprise (and, indeed, to Mr Stuart's), his being gay did not spread around the school. Two weeks later, for example, a child in the other Year 5 class was in trouble for using homophobic insults, and had no inkling that Mr Stuart was gay. When I interviewed Samantha and Louise, I asked them about gossip:

DE: D'you sometimes gossip about each other or about Mr Stuart?

Louise: Yeah

DE: Who d'you gossip with?

Louise: Just my friends really. We don't really like spread it because it's not very nice.

Samantha: And then the teachers would know, or our friends would know.

Louise: Yes, they might think it's true and then they'll ask him and then it's not true, like rumours.

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DE: Like what kind of things would that be?
Louise: Well, like, rumours
DE: Rumours, like what kind of rumours?
Louise: About, um, that two teachers like each other and that
Samantha: Yeah, Mr Stuart and Ms Allen love each other
Louise: Yeah, but then other people might find out and then if Mr Snowden finds out anything that it's true then he might sack them. But they're, um, they're best friends but not like, but they're best friends
Samantha: Yeah, yeah
DE: Mm. Cos I remember that came up in class one day didn't it that, when someone said --
Samantha: I think it was Levi. Just because they were talking to each other a lot
Louise: In the shop and they go to, um, they go to lunch break together
Samantha: I think they go to lunch break
Louise: That doesn't mean that they like each other, but they're just friends
DE: Well, they like each other, but like each other as friends.
Louise: I think they just go to lunch break together to talk about what you're going to do and then you can do it after and things.
DE: Yeah.
Louise: And then they take another idea and they both do it.
DE: Yeah, because they've got the same year.
Samantha: Yeah and like, Mr West and Ms Humphrey do it as well.
DE: So it's the year group teachers. But what, what about, I mean, so you wouldn't want Mr Snowden to hear that Mr Stuart and Ms Allen were boyfriend and girlfriend because you know it's not true, but what about things that would be true? Would you gossip about them?
Samantha: No
Louise: No, not really because Mr Stuart doesn't want them to know, he just wants the class to know.
DE: How d'you know that? What makes you think that?
Samantha: Yeah. Maybe, if he told us and then he might not want the whole school to know.
Louise: We wouldn't have done it
DE: Why would he not want the whole school to know?
Samantha: I dunno
DE: To know what?
Samantha: To know anything really
Louise: Anything, to like uh --
Samantha: He wouldn't tell us anything personal. Maybe he'd tell us that he, his auntie got his hair cut, her hair cut and
DE: Well, he <u>did</u> tell you about his boyfriend going to America, didn't he?
Louise: Yeah
Samantha: Yeah, but, he doesn't want, really, everyone at the school to know.
Louise: Maybe he does but, I don't know, I wouldn't really spread it because --
Samantha: Cos it people go a bit funny in this school about --
Louise: Yeah and then they'd go, they'd jump around and tell --
Samantha: Their mum and dad --
Louise: - and then they'd say 'is it true?' or something. And maybe their mum and dad will think that he's a bad teacher and then they'll think that 'oh no, my son is going to be, like, um, don't want my daughter, he's going to be like that, so I'm going to take my kid away from the school' and tell Mr Snowden about him and he could be sacked

DE: D'you think that would happen?
Samantha: No.
Louise: No, not really, cos, most grown-ups are, um, grown-up about it but some aren't really. Some are.
Samantha: Yeah, but, um, Mr Snowden knows, I think
Louise: Yeah, probably does. I think most of the teachers do, but that could happen and then the parents might think that he's a bit strange.
Samantha: Strange.
Louise: So that if he's in class and they might take their child out.
DE: So you would be, like, really worried about Mr Stuart and what would happen to him? It sounds like you'd be really kind of, protecting him, yeah?
Louise: Yeah, we don't, cos we don't like supply teachers at all really.
Samantha: I know, cos we don't want a new teacher.

I have quoted this extract at length because I think it is fascinating in what it shows about the children's awareness. Firstly, it is clear that there has been quite a bit of gossip about Mr Stuart and Ms Allen. In fact, Ms Allen identifies as lesbian and they are good friends both in and outside school as well as working together in developing study programmes for the year group. Secondly, the neither the girls nor I ever use the word 'gay'. We all know what we are talking about, here. It is, in Eve Sedgwick (1990)terms, an 'open secret'. Thirdly, the children are absolutely aware that homophobia is a feature of the society that they have to negotiate. They know that 'some grown-ups are grown-up about it, but some aren't really' and seem to have made a conscious (or semi-conscious) decision to build a kind of closet around the classroom in order to protect their teacher since they 'don't like supply teachers' and 'don't want a new teacher'.

Conclusion

The children in Edendale School and the others where I spent time were constantly engaged in the performance of gender. In this paper, I have shown that such performances are embedded in discourses of hetero/sexuality. Far from schools being places where sexuality is brought in by trendy or politically correct teachers, it is part of the stuff of the everyday life of school children from a very young age. This paper is far from exhaustive. I have not, for instance, explored the cultures of teaching or the production of teacher identities in relation to sexuality. However, I hope that I have said enough to show that cultures of schooling are, indeed, cultures of sexuality.

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